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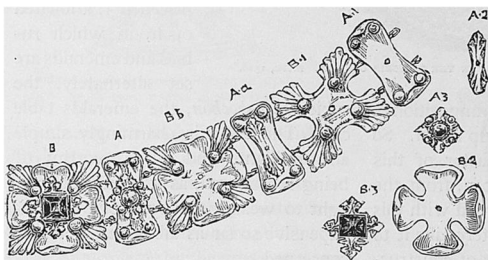


## HINTS IN DESIGN FROM GREAT PAINTERS.

BY G. T. ROBINSON.

As we examine the work of the great painters of the past, we are more and more astonished at their versatility in design for all kinds of decorative accessories, but in no branch of industrial art is this more prolifically set forth than in their designs for works in metal, and especially in those for works in precious metals. Nor is this without reason, for if we study their biographies we shall see that from the goldsmith's and the chaser's bench a very large por-

tion of the greater painters rose to the easel; and not infrequently the two arts of the goldsmith and the painter were prosecuted simultaneously by them. Hence it is that they illustrate technical process as well as design in the ornaments with which they deck their figure subjects, or in the gorgeous plate which is often a very important feature in the accessories of their painted work. As an illustration of how carefully and intelligently they represented the technical production of the objects they introduced, there can hardly be a more precise example than the carcanet worn by Margaret Knoblauchin, and which appeared in a picture by Hans Asper, painted about 1550, and now in the



FROM A PICTURE BY HANS ASPER, IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND.  
DATE, ABOUT 1550.

National Gallery of Ireland, a gallery rapidly becoming one of European interest, thanks to the assiduous care and ubiquitous search of its zealous director.

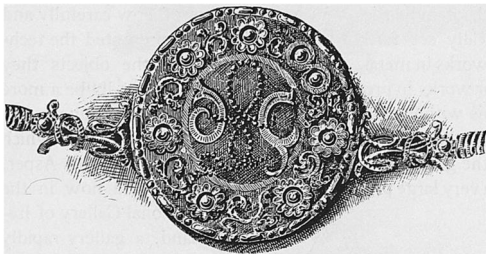
Of Hans Asper himself we know but little, excepting that he was born at Zurich about 1499, and was held in such repute in the early

half of the sixteenth century that a portrait medal was struck in his honor; but the greater fame of his contemporary Hans Holbein not only eclipsed his, but also has caused many of Asper's works to be assigned to the Augsburg master. And yet by a study

portion of the greater painters rose to the easel; and not infrequently the two arts of the goldsmith and the painter were prosecuted simultaneously by them. Hence it is that they illustrate technical process as well as design in the admirable rendering of the personal

of the accessories introduced into their pictures, there need be no hesitation in assigning each work to its proper painter, for in Asper's work there is always lingering that mediæval feeling which was fading away, whilst in Holbein's the influence of the Renaissance which was then dawning over Western Europe was always present. If you examine Holbein's wonderful designs for jewelry and goldsmith's works you will see that casting and chasing—those Italian processes which were spreading westward—always predominate, whilst in Asper's designs for these objects the basis of the execu-

motive A has for its foundation an ovoid piece of sheet metal (A 1), the ends of which are turned over and the center slightly bumped up; four small pearls are set in the depression thus formed; upon this a narrow slip, beaten into fine ridges at the ends (A 2) is placed, and a small quatrefoil plaque having four small and one large pearl set in it (A 3) forms the head of the rivet which pins all three pieces together. The alternating square motive B is similarly constructed. The base plate B 1 has its terminals beaten into small gadroons with four pearls set on it. Upon this is imposed B 2, a quatrefoil plate boldly turned over, affording beautifully deep shadows in the gold and just clipping the pearls, which serve as stays to prevent the plate turning round on its rivet; and over this is placed B 3, a foliated ouch, in which rubies and emeralds are set alternately, the



CLASP OF GIRDLE, FROM A PORTRAIT IN THE BRUSSELS GALLERY. DATE, 1518.

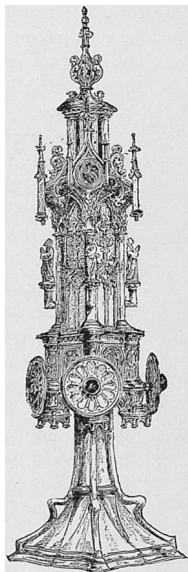
tion was always the superimposition of separate plates of beaten-up metal. So thoroughly was he a master of this branch of art, that we can, from the portrait he has here adorned with this beautiful carcanet, absolutely take it to pieces and see the process of construction, and, as it is a typical illustration of mediæval goldsmith's work, it is well worth the study. This carcanet, or necklace, is composed of alternating narrow and square motives linked together by very fine chainwork. Each of these is composed of three plaques of thin sheet gold, beaten up very slightly and jeweled; thus, the narrow

rubies *en cabochon*, the emeralds table cut. The effect is charmingly simple and brilliant, and quite worthy of being reproduced, as it would be very light to wear, yet very strong and inexpensive so far as labor and metal are concerned.

Of Holbein's designs for jewelry and goldsmith's work it is not my intention now to speak. Apart from those shown on his various portraits, there exist in the museums of London and Bâle fine collections of designs made especially for working purposes, and these are about to be issued as a separate volume, having been reproduced in photograv-

ure from the original designs for this purpose.

One of the great charms of the personal ornaments of the sixteenth and



DESIGN IN GOLD, FROM A PICTURE BY MABUSE.  
DATE, ABOUT 1500. CASTLE HOWARD COLLECTION.

seventeenth centuries is their individuality, almost each one having some special and allusive design embodied in it; for there seems in those better days to have been no Birmingham whence these things came by the gross, and one of the best means of improving the condition of that much-enduring race of art workers, the working goldsmith, silversmith, and jeweler, would be, by all who can afford such luxuries insisting on an individual design and an individual work being produced for them. The ulterior value of such jewelry would be increased far beyond the additional

outlay at first required, and as family relics such would be of enduring interest. During the periods above referred to even the ordinary *bourgeoisie* had their personal ornaments made for them, and the clasp of a girdle worn by a lady of the middle class, painted by an unknown artist, now in the Brussels Gallery, affords us a good illustration of how simply this can be done. It is a gold disk, chased and set with pearls and coral, and bearing the initials of the wearer or the donor, and which fastens a girdle composed of twisted wire and coral. Neither of the suggestions thus offered belongs to the costly order of jewelry, and they have been purposely chosen for illustration as being within the reach of the many. When we come to examine the designs of the *tours de force* of the jewelers' and goldsmiths' art depicted by the great painters, we ascend almost to the unattainable, and are wonderstruck at the evidences of a



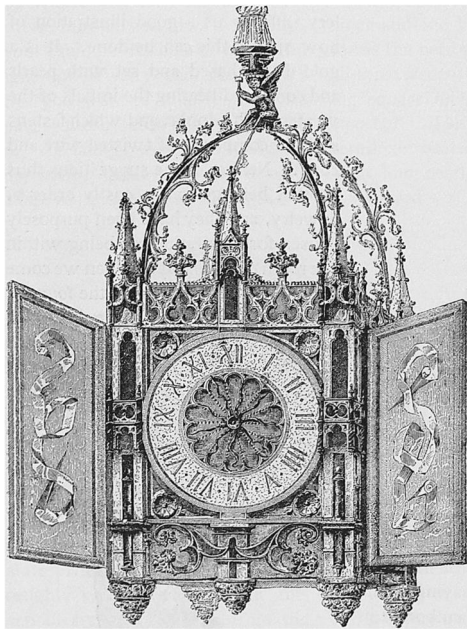
FROM A PICTURE BY MABUSE. BRUSSELS GALLERY.

wealth almost beyond credence; though it is to be remembered that then stocks and shares were not, that consols did not exist, and the readiest investments

of those days were such as could easily be transported or consigned to the Lombard or Israelitish pawnbroker for the nonce, too many, alas! to find their ulterior destination to be the crucible; and thus it is these painted records of them become the largest and best

them in old inventories and wills, and the record of them in old pictures, we should be ignorant of the marvelous amount of art with which the goldsmith dressed the buffets and the high tables of our ancestors. Fortunately, the painters of the past recorded them abundantly, and of these Jean Mabuse holds foremost place.

Jean Gossaert, who was called from the place of his birth Jean de Maubeuge, or sometimes by the Flemish equivalent, Jennyn de Henegouwe, or again by its Latinized form, Malbodius, is an artist who bears many names, but of whom there is really very little biographic knowledge extant; even the date of his birth is a matter of wide dispute, varying from 1470 to 1499, according to differing writers, but his death, in 1532, is more definitely fixed by the discovery of the record of it in the registry of Notre-Dame at Antwerp. This, consider-



HANGING CLOCK, FROM A PICTURE BY MABUSE, IN THE BRUSSELS GALLERY.

field for the study of their suggestions in design preserved to us.

This is particularly the case with regard to those larger articles, the greater value of which led to their more frequent destruction, save when the custody of the church or the fear of sacrilege preserved them. The great pieces of domestic plate have well-nigh all perished, and, excepting for the notices of

ing the number of his works known to exist, and their wide variety of style, renders it most probable that the earlier of these birth-dates is correct. He left Flanders in the first decade of the sixteenth century, and remained for some time in Italy. How long he remained there is again disputed, some writers fixing ten months as the duration of his visit, whilst

others extend his sojourn to ten years. The probability is that between these dates he made two visits, but what is really important to bear in mind is that he has two distinct styles of working, the one previous to his visit to Italy, when his mediæval manner is predominant, and the other when, after contact with the Renaissance of Italy, that mode became a marked feature in his work. It is this dual character of design and painting which renders his pictures a particularly useful field for study to those interested in the development of the accessory arts. From a very noble example of his first phase, "The Adoration of the Magi," in the Castle Howard collection, we cull a wonderful example of his skill as a designer for goldsmith's work. This is the tall offering of gold presented by King Melchior to the newly born Messiah. It must be nearly three feet high, and is most elaborately designed, and so admirably delineated that it would be quite possible to carry it into material execution from Mabuse's picture.

That it is an original design, and not a painting from an actual piece of work, is abundantly demonstrated by the falseness of some of its shadows, and the absence of those innumerable reflected lights which would render the draughtsmanship of such an elaborately wrought piece of plate almost impossible; and it is all so clearly made out that the plan of each portion is as distinct as possible. That it was a personal design, created by Mabuse himself, and that it was a production he prided himself upon, may

be inferred from the fact that long years after — probably twenty years afterward — he introduced the same design, but apparently executed in marble, into his very beautiful picture of "Adam and Eve," in the Prince of Wales's Presence Chamber at Hampton Court (No. 385), a picture quite of his latest character.



REPOUSSÉ SILVER VASE, FROM A PICTURE BY PETER ROESTRATEN.

There it serves as the fountain of Paradise, whence issue the rivers of the world, though for what purpose it was first designed it is difficult to say. In form it is like a monstrance or a reliquary, excepting that it is entirely of gold, ornamented only by four large cabochon-cut jewels, and it was probably only designed as a fine table ornament, and had no religious signification, notwithstanding its destination, but was

merely designed as an ornament worthy to be presented to the new-born King. The cup, the crown, the scepter, borne by the two other kings, and all their personal accessories delineated in this very beautiful picture, are miracles of draughtsmanship, and quite equal to the most intricate work of Lucas van Leyden, Mabuse's friend and comrade, and who by some writers is supposed to have assisted him in these elaborately designed ornaments, though there is nothing to warrant such an assertion, for Mabuse was quite competent to invent and paint his own accessories. From his magnificent picture of "Mary Magdalen in the house of the Pharisee," in the Brussels Gallery, a picture which abounds with suggestions in decorative art, comes this admirable design for a hanging clock in wrought iron, which is drawn with the utmost accuracy and of the highest finish; indeed, so fine is it that I had to obtain permission to have a large pair of steps set up in front of the picture before I could examine it sufficiently closely to see its fine detail, and am glad to here record the courtesy and readiness to assist me in my researches shown by the authorities of the Brussels Gallery. But there is hardly one minute detail of this large picture which is not a record of, or a suggestion for, decorative design. The trestle tables are of wrought metal and of excellent design, and the pot of

precious ointment brought by the Magdalen is an elegant bit of faint blue salt-glazed stone-ware mounted in gold, with thin gold twist wrought round all its curves, and a faint blue penciling sparsely drawn over its surface, and which we here engrave.

If the gleaning from but two examples of one painter's work produces so much, what will not a study of the works of the innumerable painters who wrought in Germany, Flanders, France, and Italy reveal? The yield is so enormous that there is plenty of room for a crowd of gleaners. At present I cannot pursue the record of the designs for metal-work further than to call attention to the amount of design embodied in the works of the still-life painters of Holland. These abound with literal transcripts from fine old plate long since gone into the melting crucible, and of which no other record remains. Here is one example, a highly repoussé silver vase, frequently painted by Peter Roestraten, the pupil and son-in-law of Franz Hals, and who came to England in Charles II.'s time, painting many decorative still-life pieces, and dying in London in 1698. It is full of ornamental suggestiveness, and of one of the best periods of decorative art in England, the period of Streater, of Grinling Gibbons, of Faithorne, and a host of *petits maitres*, whose works have been more enduring than their names.

